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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 002141

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [BM](#) [CB](#) [LA](#) [VM](#) [IN](#) [ARF](#)

SUBJECT: STRONG INDIAN VIEWS ON EAST ASIA SUMMIT

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 919

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 8015

Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt. Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) In the strongest language we have heard so far from the GOI on the East Asia Summit (EAS), MEA Joint Secretary (Southeast Asia) Mitra Vashishta asserted that if India is left out, New Delhi will resort to "other means." Meeting with PolCouns and Poloff on March 17, she insisted on a status for India equal to that of the Plus Three partners (Japan, Korea, China), calling for an ASEAN plus Four arrangement, with an agenda distinct from that of ASEAN plus One or Three. Vashishta argued that the "world recognizes India," therefore the country must be included, and elaborated "other means" for further cultivation of India's CMLV (Cambodia, Burma, Laos, Vietnam) "clients" to support the GOI bid.

[1](#)2. (C) Possibly referring to one of the three options from the March ASEAN senior officials' meeting (Ref A), ASEAN plus Three plus India, Australia, and New Zealand, Vashishta asserted that India cannot be "clubbed" with Australia. Vashishta also rebuffed the only ASEAN plus Three possibility for the EAS, stating that "they already have an ASEAN plus Three."

[1](#)3. (U) Speaking at a March 17 CSIS-sponsored conference on Southeast and East Asia, former Indian Ambassador to Laos SD Muni remarked that New Delhi considers CMLV the "new ASEAN, strategically and economically distinct from the rest." Echoing Vashishta's comments after the November 2004 ASEAN plus One summit (Ref B) about India's "special relationship" with those four countries, Muni described this as an area with greater space for Indian involvement in the areas of security, energy, and economic and technological assistance.

Comment

[1](#)4. (C) The East Asia Summit presents something of a test case for India's aspirations in Asia. The GOI view on the EAS has evolved from dismissal to alarm at the possibility of being excluded from a new Asia club. Realizing that the EAS is likely to happen, and that it is not necessarily a given that it will include India, the GOI may turn up its lobbying efforts, a tactic the Singapore High Commission had previously criticized New Delhi for not pursuing (Ref B).
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